

CARL T. ROWAN

Pers. Rowan, Carl T.
322 4-11-67 Ramparts
Area Intl. Union of Students

Miasma of Political Distrust Grows

A few days ago a brief, cryptic report out of Prague, Czechoslovakia, was passed among a handful of top officials in Washington.

It said that an editor of Ramparts magazine had come to Prague and held "a long, secret session" with officers of the Communist-controlled International Union of Students.

Ramparts is the magazine that exposed the fact that the Central Intelligence Agency has been financing the National Students Association, which in turn has worked for several years to prevent the IUS from dominating the youth of the world.

The Prague report aroused deep suspicions here among officials who are privately shocked and dismayed at the damage to the CIA and to U.S. foreign policy interests caused by the endless series of busted intelligence "covers" that has resulted from the Ramparts' expose.

"What, if any, relationship does Ramparts have to the IUS?" "What is the full story of Ramparts' financial backing?" Those are the questions being asked in tight, high-level circles here.

I learned that the Prague visitor was supposed to be Robert Scheer, Ramparts' managing editor. I telephoned him in San Francisco and asked if he had met with IUS officers in Prague a couple of weeks ago.

"Yes," he said. "How did you know?"

I failed to reply, and he went on to volunteer that he had spent two days meeting with representatives of the National Liberation Front, political arm of the Communist Viet Cong in South Vietnam, and with IUS leaders.

Scheer hedged for a while when asked who controls the IUS, but finally said, "It is essentially an organ of the foreign policy of the Soviet Union."

"Look," Scheer continued, "I went to the IUS headquarters strictly for journalistic reasons. I was in Europe doing a piece for Ramparts on Bertrand Russell (the 94-year-old British philosopher who plans a Vietnam 'war crimes trial' of President Johnson), so I just went to Prague to check the international impli-

cations of our article on the NSA.

"We don't truck with communism at Ramparts," Scheer went on voluntarily. "We compare the U.S. position in Vietnam with the actions of the Soviet Union in Hungary. Both are intolerable, and we make no bones about it.

"Any attempt to smear us at Ramparts is libelous, and we'll sue. I warned the same thing when there were mutterings about me being a Communist when I ran for Congress."

I report this not to throw a smoke screen over the revelations about the CIA. Ramparts' politics, foreign contacts, financial support or motives do not alter the rightness or wrongness of CIA's involvement in scores of American organizations.

I report it because Scheer's mission to Prague illustrates the hideous degree of guilt by association that permeates the furor over the CIA and the various foundations and organizations that have been labeled "CIA links."

No matter how fragile those "links" may have been, many Americans are disposed to think of the groups as "tainted." They are presumed to have bartered away their integrity for lucre from what, strangely, has come to be regarded as a "dirty" organization, "untouchable" by normal Americans.

And, likewise, some people are prepared to believe the worst about Scheer's activities in Prague.

The miasma of political distrust grows more poisonous in our land every day.

Well, I'm not prepared to assume that the people who run "Crossroads Africa" lost their integrity, or that the American Newspaper Guild "compromised the integrity of journalists" because they got money from foundations with CIA ties.

And until proof of something else is presented, I have to assume that Scheer went to Prague on a journalistic mission.

But Scheer and Ramparts have intensified America's mood of suspicion. Everybody is being asked to "come clean" these days and tell

where he gets his money. Before the suspicion fades, Ramparts may find it desirable to reveal in detail who has provided the estimated million and a half dollars the magazine will have lost by the end of this year. And Scheer may have more to say about his mission to Prague.

That might lay to rest the rumors that Ramparts is not only a muckraker, but a muckraker with a malevolent motive.

© 1967

Pers. Scheer, Robert